

The Practice of CSR: A Study on Telecommunication Industry In Bangladesh

Eliza Huq 1 *

Monalisa Salam 2 *

ABSTRACT

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a concept whereby organizations consider the interests of society by taking responsibility for the impact of their activities on customers, employees, shareholders, communities and the environment in all aspects of their operations. This is a research paper aimed at gaining insights about the practice of CSR by mobile phone operators in Bangladesh. Data were collected from 4 operators through in-depth interview with selected personnel. Non probability sampling method, namely judgmental sampling was used for the study. The main findings of the study indicate that all the companies hold similar views regarding CSR and it is found that all the sampled companies think CSR is linked with protection of human rights, protection of environment and community involvements. Although theoretically CSR is linked with protection of employee rights, maintaining relations with suppliers and having proper monitoring system, companies are not certain about the linkage.

Key words: CSR, Shareholders, in-depth interview, Non probability sampling, Community involvement.

Introduction:

CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) has been described as charitable giving, strategic philanthropy, community involvement, or cause-related marketing. While there is no universal definition of corporate social responsibility, it generally refers to transparent business practices that are based on ethical values, compliance with legal requirements, and respect for people, communities, and the environment. Thus, beyond making profits, companies are responsible for the totality of their impact on people and the planet.¹ "People" constitute the company's stakeholders: its employees, customers, business partners, investors, suppliers and vendors, the government, and the community. Increasingly, stakeholders expect that companies should be more environmentally and socially responsible in conducting their business. In the business community, CSR is alternatively referred to as "corporate citizenship," which essentially means that a company should be a "good neighbor" within its host community. However, none of these descriptions really does the concept justice. CSR involves doing business in a responsible fashion that delivers value not only to the organization, but also to its stakeholders and the community within which it operates. CSR covers five main areas: environment, community, employee welfare, financial performance and corporate governance.

* Lecturers,
Faculty of Business Administration
Stamford University

CSR is a concept whereby organizations consider the interests of society by taking responsibility for the impact of their activities on customers, employees, shareholders, communities and environment in all aspects of their operations. This obligation is seen to extend beyond the statutory obligation to comply with legislation along with organizations voluntarily taking further steps to improve the quality of life for employees and their families as well as for the local community and society at large.

The practice of CSR is subject to much debate and criticism. Proponents argue that there is a strong business case for CSR, in that corporations benefit in multiple ways by operating with a perspective broader and longer than their own immediate, short-term profits. Critics argue that CSR distracts from the fundamental economic role of businesses, others argue that it is nothing more than superficial window-dressing, still others argue that it is an attempt to pre-empt the role of governments as a watchdog over powerful multinational corporations. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corporate_social_responsibility]

Within the world of business, the main "responsibility" for corporations has historically been to make money and increase shareholder value. In other words, corporate financial responsibility has been the sole bottom line driving force. However, in the last decade, a movement defining broader corporate responsibilities for environment, local communities, for working conditions, and ethical practices has gathered momentum. This new driving force is known as *corporate social responsibility* (CSR). CSR is also often described as the corporate "triple bottom line"-the totality of the corporation's financial, social, and environmental performance in conducting business.

The late 1950s saw the beginning of the rise of consumer power as a force to influence corporate behavior, joined in the early 1970s by environmental concerns and the growth of single-issue pressure groups. Since the 1980s, dramatic political and economic changes around the world have brought social responsibility issues to the fore again. The dominant idea in political thought at the time was to shrink the role of the state, especially to reduce the cost of state-funded welfare and cultural obligations and to place greater responsibility on the individual and on business.

During this period telecommunications and other forms of electronic communications were improving fast, increasing the speed at which news and information traveled and effectively shrinking the globe. Such developments helped business, especially multinationals, take advantage of the opportunities in new markets and to manage their growth away from their home base. But it also led to what has become known as the 'CNN world', where global television reporting networks and the Internet have made the dissemination of information both easy and instantaneous. The ability to communicate globally with such efficiency has occurred at a time when the respect for all established

authority, professions and social frameworks is diminishing. Critics of business have, if anything, become better informed aided by global communications, especially the Internet. At the same time, companies are experiencing demands for change from within, largely driven by a generational shift, with younger managers more acutely aware of a need to align their personal and corporate value systems with those of the consensus in the broader society. Companies are consequently under pressure from both outside and within to be more open, more accountable for a wide range of actions, and to report publicly on their performance in social and environmental arenas. This leads to the emergence of a new concept in business that is known as CSR.

CSR demands that businesses manage economic, social and environmental impacts of their operations to maximise benefits and minimise the downsides. Key CSR issues include governance, environmental management, stakeholder engagement, labour standards, employee and community relations, social equity, responsible sourcing and human rights.

CSR is not only about fulfilling a duty to society; it should also bring competitive advantage. Through an effective CSR programme, companies can:

- ☐ improve access to capital
- ☐ sharpen decision-making and reduce risk
- ☐ enhance brand image
- ☐ uncover previously hidden commercial opportunities, including new markets
- ☐ reduce costs
- ☐ attract, retain and motivate employees (<http://www.csrnetwork.com/csr.asp>)

Given the different socio-economic context of developing countries it is argued that it is important to learn about the CSR practices in those countries. In Bangladesh the telecommunication industry is a pioneer in practicing Corporate Social Responsibility. This study reports the results of a survey on CSR practices in Bangladesh in the context of telecommunication industry.

Corporate Social Responsibility is the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life for the workforce and their families as well as for the local community and society at large (www.wbcsd.ch/corp1.htm/dialogues).

The World Business Council for Sustainability and Development (WBCSD) defines CSR as commitment of business to contribute to sustainable economic development, working with employees, their families, the local community and society at large to improve their quality of life.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) can be defined as the integration of social and environmental concerns into enterprises' business operations and interactions with stakeholders. Accordingly, the main function of an enterprise

can be understood as the creation of value through the production of goods and services needed by society, and which includes generation of profit for its owners and other stakeholders, and better welfare for society (Chang, 2006).

The power of multinational businesses is really comparable to that of entire countries in terms of wealth, and that the power of governmental influence is not as great as before. In turbulent societies where business success is impossible, businesses are only part of the problem. Therefore, the public has higher expectations for businesses and is beginning to demand that businesses set their goals not only on protecting shareholders, interests and generating profits but also that they shoulder even more social responsibility. This has, in turn, driven a series of discussions and developments around the world related to the issue of corporate social responsibility (Ou, 2005). Corporate Social Responsibility involves many dimensions, such as whether the enterprise treats its employees well, including its protection of the environment, its attitude toward the ecology, its willingness to provide safe and reliable products, and even its very existence. A complete corporate responsibility accounting system must be able to effectively disclose both quantitative and qualitative information on all of these dimensions (Kang, 2006).

Multinational corporations have reason to pay close attention to current trends in the field of corporate social responsibility. Given the wide range of social and political contexts that surround their operations, companies should not hide from or cover up the unfortunate fact that human rights abuses may occur. Rather, companies should develop business policies meant to leverage both their abilities to prevent such abuses and their capacities to respond proactively and responsibly when they do occur. (Altschuller 2008) <http://csc.typepad.com/responsiblesourcing/2008/04/csr-the-need-fo.html>) In recent times a business case has been made for CSR around the world (Pachauri, 2004). A number of academic observers (Belal, 2002; O'Dwyer, 2002; Owen, Swift, & Hunt, 2001; Owen, Swift, Humphrey, and Bowerman, 2000), however, have expressed concern that current CSR practice has failed to achieve the fundamental objective of transparency and accountability (Medawar, 1976). Furthermore, empirical research within the CSR literature has consistently shown that businesses traditionally focus on issues of interest to powerful economic stakeholders while neglecting "eco-justice" issues that are of relevance to less powerful social stakeholders (Belal, 2002; O'Dwyer, Unerman, & Bradley, 2005; O'Dwyer, Unerman, & Hession, 2005).

CSR is an integral part of sustainable development. Exactly where it fits in is vigorously debated, mainly because the concept of sustainable development also has many different interpretations. According to WBCSD discussion CSR is linked with human rights, employee rights, environment, community involvement, supplier relation and monitoring and assessing (www.wbcsd.ch/corp1.htm/dealouge).

CSR is defined in many ways but no universal definition is in place. However, Hill (2006) explained that CSR is a set of practices that form a part of good management or business practices and much of it is about transparency and disclosure. Hussain and Hussain (2005) provided a constructive picture between consumer's and organizational spending pattern on different CSR activities. They also figured out whether consumers expect to incorporate only brand name, or only company name or both brand and company name while organizing CSR activities. Carroll (1991) viewed 1980s as a shift to more empirical research applying his proposed four dimensional pyramid model responsibility. He suggested that CSR include four kinds of responsibilities or dimensions: economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic. In 1979 he offered a conceptual model that comprehensively describes essential aspects of corporate social performance. He addressed three aspects of the model. Mohr, Webb and Harris (2001) viewed corporate social responsibility as a company's commitment to minimizing and eliminating any harmful effects on society and maximizing its long term beneficial impact.

Chowdhury (2004) believes that, as a part of corporate governance, corporate governance and monitoring constitute an important control device. The independent roles of non-executive directors in a society are dependent on economic, socio-political and cultural factors of that society. Asia, particularly China, Japan, India, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Indonesia, are characterized by collectivism and paternalism where there is high loyalty to senior people and juniors and subordinates obey seniors' wishes and desires.

Mathoney and Thorne(2005) examined the association between long term compensation and corporate social responsibility(CSR) for 90 publicly traded Canadian firms. Social responsibility is considered to include concerns for social factors and the environment. They found a significant relationship between long-term compensation and total CSR weakness as well as the product/environmental weakness dimension of CSR.

Zahra and La Tour (1987) identified three major themes in research on corporate social responsibility(CSR) of particular interest; one of them is the political link between CSR and organizational effectiveness(OE). Data collected from 410 college graduate and undergraduate students were used to examine that relationship. Using factor analysis, eight dimensions of CSR and three components of OE were extracted. They performed Canonical analysis. The result supports the proposition that specific CSR practices affect select OE outcomes.

McGuire, Sundgren and Schneeweis (1988), using Fortune Magazine's ratings of corporate social reputations, analyzed the relationships between perceptions of firms' corporate social responsibility and measures of their financial performance. They found a firm's prior performance, assessed by both stock-market returns and accounting-based measures, was more closely related to corporate social responsibility than was subsequent performance. Measures of risk were more closely associated with social responsibility than previous studies had suggested.

Wartick and Cochran (1985) traced the evolution of the corporate social performance model by focusing on three challenges to the concept of corporate social responsibility: economic responsibility, public responsibility and social responsiveness. They also examined social issues management as a dimension of corporate social performance. Their research concluded that the corporate social performance model is valuable for business and societal study and that it provides the beginnings of a paradigm for the field.

There are many sound reasons both for and against business's assumption of social responsibilities. Because of the increasing amount of rhetoric which exists on this subject, it is appropriate to examine these reasons thoughtfully when making choices in this area (Davis, 1973). Considering the information from 75 sample companies listed in Dhaka Stock Exchange, Hossain, Salat and Al-Amin (2005) concluded that though some of the companies had been reporting on some corporate social responsibility issues in spite of having no mandatory requirements, the disclosure was not adequate. Among the 75 sample companies, 26 (34.66%) companies did not disclose any information on the CSR activities. They considered eleven issues on CSR disclosed by the companies. So the percentage of the companies disclosing at least one CSR issue in the total sample was 65.33%. This result has significance in case of voluntary disclosure by the Bangladeshi companies.

Objective of the Study

General Objective:

The general objective of the study is to explore what is going on inside the organizations in terms of the practice of Corporate Social Responsibility.

Specific objectives:

In order to achieve the general objective, the specific objectives that have been pursued are whether the companies protect CSR in terms of:

1. human rights
2. employee rights
3. the living environment
4. community involvement
5. maintaining supplier relations
6. stakeholders rights
7. ensuring effective monitoring system.

Methodology:

Research Design

This is a research paper for exploring the practice of CSR by mobile phone operators in Bangladesh. The research objective requires an exploratory research design (Malhotra, 2001, 85) and a qualitative research method. Since the research approach is inductive and qualitative in nature, the researchers have collected information through in-depth interview with selected personnel in each of the sampled operators.

Population and Sample:

From a total of 6 operators 4 operators have been selected to collect data. Purposive or judgmental sampling technique was used to select the sample. Data were collected from Grameen Phone, Citycell, Banglalink and Aktel.

For the purpose of this research data were collected through unstructured in-depth interview. In accordance with the research objective in-depth interview method has been used as a primary means to collect data in order to understand 'what', 'how' and 'why' aspects of the organizational context being observed and studied.

Findings of the study

CSR and Human Rights:

Human rights are the universal rights that every person is entitled to enjoy and have them protected. Theoretically protection of human right is considered an integral part of CSR. In the present study it is found that all the companies included in the sample are considering that the protection of human rights is linked with corporate social responsibility.

The study reveals the following facts regarding the corporate social responsibility being practiced by the companies:

- ❑ They do believe that the corporations should show obligations toward the society.
- ❑ Companies should keep human rights on the corporate 'radar', be aware of what happens in other parts of the world and in different business sectors, and learn from others' good practice.
- ❑ Sustainable development can be achieved through the practice of CSR.

The study also uncovers the different steps taken by the companies to protect human rights.

Company	Activity
Grameen Phone	Tele medicine, Hospital on Wheel, financial aid to flood victims, financial aid to earth quake victims in Pakistan, scholarship to underprivileged students, employment opportunity for Acid victims. Agreement with CARE Bangladesh to launch a project titled 'Tathyo Tari' (Information Boat) that is designed to provide necessary livelihood information to the riverine communities of Bangladesh.
Aktel	Providing aid at the time of natural disaster, providing scholarships every year to three promising individuals to complete their higher studies in Multimedia University in Cyberjaya, Malaysia. To provide a world-class teaching and learning resources for Bangladeshi professionals AKTEL joined hands with Chittagong Skills Development Centre (CSDC), Underprivileged Children's Educational Programs (UCEP-Bangladesh), etc. building orphanages and renovations of mosques all across the country.
Citycell	Developing retailers way of living, Education for poor children..
Banglalink	Providing Aid at the time of natural disaster.

During the interview session it was clear that all the companies are practicing CSR in terms of employee rights in a similar manner.

CSR and Employee Rights

Employee rights are embodied in the International Labour Organization's Declarations on the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. These include: freedom of association at work, elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory work, abolition of child labor and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

The research shows the following facts with respect to the exercise of employee rights by the companies:

- ☐ Company allows the freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining to its employees.
- ☐ There is no scope of forced labor and compulsory labor in their organizations.
- ☐ They do not discriminate in respect of employment and there is no form of discrimination at work.
- ☐ They do believe that their companies are exerting higher level of social stewardship when dealing with employee rights.
- ☐ All the companies believe that company should provide awareness training to their staff about their rights.
- ☐ Diversity in terms of cultural and gender in the workplace is being welcomed by these companies.

Although companies are claiming that they are very keen in protecting employee rights, they are not certain whether protection of employee rights is an integral part of CSR.

CSR and Environment

All the sampled companies believe that environment issues are inter-linked with many aspects of CSR. Protecting environment from the impact of operations is a core responsibility of the companies. Besides their legal responsibility corporations are seen to have a broad responsibility to protect the physical environment throughout their supply chains. They should commit to continuous improvements in eco-efficiency (doing more with less) and managing the full life-cycle of their product or service.

The study uncovers the following areas where the companies are exercising their responsibilities toward the environment as a part of CSR:

- ☐ Protecting the environment from the impact of operation is a core responsibility of the companies.
- ☐ There is a strong evidence that all the companies believe that companies should be proactive on the environment issue and seek solutions that can lead to competitive advantage.

The sample Companies are going one step ahead to preserve the environment and toward the restoration of the ecological balance. The study found that some companies are concerned and actively taking part to maintain the Cox's Bazar sea beach(Citicell and Banglalink),some of them are providing financial aid to keep the city clean and green (Grameen Phone, Aktel, Citicell).

CSR and community involvement

Community issues cover a broad range of activities, including community assistance programs, supporting educational needs, fostering a shared vision of a corporation's role in the community, ensuring community health and safety, sponsorship, enabling employees to do voluntary work in the community and philanthropic activities.

With some exception most of the companies do believe that maintaining community relations can be viewed as a part of CSR. Some of the key issues derived from the study can be summarized as follows:

- ❑ All the companies maintain community relations with a strong focus on core business impacts and interactions as well as on more traditional philanthropy.
- ❑ Companies do believe that they must deal with the tension between the priorities of different communities, such as those of employees and local residents.
- ❑ Top management makes a sincere effort to understand community and let the community know that their concerns are taken seriously by the company.
- ❑ The companies realize the fact that building trust with the community demands consistency and long term commitment from the company.

Apart from the steps taken by all the companies Grameen Phone goes one step further by establishing community information center (CIC) around the district and thana levels in Bangladesh.

CSR and Supplier Relations

Supply chains consist in mostly complex inter-relationship between a wide range of companies. Corporations can be and are affected by the actions of their direct and indirect suppliers. They can inherit the consequences of bad practices of those higher-up chains, such as the use of child labor and polluting production methods.

- ❑ The sample companies consider that their companies are concerned about maintaining supplier relationship.
- ❑ They think that their suppliers are their partners.
- ❑ According to them supplier relations should be a two-way -street with responsibility extending in both directions.

Grameen Phone considers supplier relationship a long term phenomenon. And they believe in long term relationship with a reliable supplier.

As part of CSR Citycell conducts distributors and retailers training program. Although some companies claim that they are very conscious in maintaining supplier relations yet they do not think maintaining relations with suppliers is an integral part of CSR.

Monitoring and assessing as a part of CSR

There are different perceptions regarding the monitoring, measuring and reporting of performance against generally accepted indicators.

Some do not recognize that effective management of CSR demands monitoring and assessment against some general standard. Some of them are not bothered about any sort of strict monitoring as part of CSR. For example Grameen Phone does not consider any benchmark or standard to compare with; rather they are very sincere about their reputation and they monitor closely about the target market by customer management centre. But on an average most of them consider the possibility that companies at the high-end of supply chain can use their competitive positioning to influence others in the chain, especially through sectoral alliances.

Conclusion

CSR, in broad summary, is the ethical behavior of a company towards society. In particular, this means management acting responsibly in its relationships with other stakeholders who have a legitimate interest in the business - not just the shareholders. Progressive companies today specially the cellular phone companies recognize that maximizing profits is not all that important matter in their business practices: companies also should contribute to the broader public good and treat their employees with dignity and respect. Accordingly they should take active part in different social development programs as well as engage in more traditional philanthropic grants.

There is also a proliferation of terms - CSR, corporate citizenship, corporate sustainability, business ethics, etc. which make focusing on CSR more difficult. But the corporations are using these interchangeable terms in developing their strategic business plan that ultimately targets broader objective of wealth maximization. Directly or indirectly they assess all of their efforts toward ensuring CSR from a cost benefit perspective. Corporate donations for community programs appeared aggregated with other types of donations. All companies have direct involvement in community programs, and the specific means of action that has gained impetus recently in Bangladesh is the support given to voluntary work of staff members. Other mechanisms of community action can be observed in the institutional initiatives and partnership with other institutions.

Direct involvement in the community appeared as the most intense means of social action. The sample companies carry out social activities that benefit the community. The values disbursed in social programs is increasing over the years. Community controversy and litigation were absent. The corporation accountability theory, in brief, holds that corporations are responsible for and subject to the will of the people. The primary social responsibility of corporations is to respect individual, or "natural" rights. This means corporations must respect the rights or "moral space" of the individuals. The boundaries [of this moral space] themselves are set by the principle of the non-initiation of physical force. Thus, one is entitled to pursue whatever goals one desires provided one does not cross another's moral boundaries by the initiation of force.

Now in Bangladesh there is no set standard against which to compare whether the companies comply with their social responsibilities or not. Again there is no clear cut consensus about what is the standard upon which companies pursuing CSR can base their own program. The current most mentioned benchmarking system in the field is the Global Reporting Initiative. The companies exercise responsibilities toward different stakeholder groups but not strictly towards CSR practices; in most cases their primary concern is to maximize the wealth (profit for the shareholders).

All the companies surveyed have a social balance and an institutional concern for ethical issues and social responsibility although they are at different stages in the development of a code of ethics. However, it is not clear to these companies to what extent the existence of a code of ethics combined with its publication and training, guarantees an ethical attitude from staff members and from the company as a whole. The attitude of corporate staff and managers is very strongly associated with the example given by the organization's leader, followed by that of directors, regardless of whether such a leader is a manager or a partner of the company. These issues suggest that in this sector, the existence of a code of ethics is more effective when incorporated into a program designed to reinforce the values and attitudes practiced by company leaders. The quality of union/staff relations is greatly dependent on the industry sector in our country. Information on litigation and fines concerning safety issues was not made available, nor was information on the payment of wages, subsidies and benefits. There are two aspects that might be analyzed under corporate public responsibility, associated with its continuity. The first is the existence of long-term planning where a social responsibility focus is among the priorities. Such planning must also contemplate a measurement plan that would also include social audits. The second aspect refers to the succession processes conducted within a company, which are vital to its long term survival.

The companies are also concerned about maintaining long term relationship with their suppliers by considering them their partner for future growth.

Some of the companies indicated a means of application of ethical values to suppliers. However, none of the companies provided information on application of the code of ethics on behalf of suppliers, as was the case for litigation and public controversy involving suppliers.

The study set out to analyze the applicability of the common indicators of social responsibility and the results suggest that the proposed indicators are pertinent, considering the reality in the mobile phone sector. The study confirmed the need for a conceptual and analytical model, which can be used as reference to allow the assessment of actions within the scope of social responsibility.

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